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Prologue: Diplomacy and Sport

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In attending the London Olympiad of 2012, competitors and visitors at each venue were greeted with four flags; from left to right, they were the International Olympic flag – and the International Paralympic flag subsequently – the flags of the United Nations [UN] and the London Olympic Organising Committee [LOCOG], and the British Union Jack.¹ These flags represent polities with a number of identities, but their most straightforward were as the foremost global sporting body that governs the quadrennial gathering of the “youth of the world”, the pre-eminent international organisation of states, a temporary organisational body, and the flag of a nation-state adopted in 1801. Each of these symbols is itself a form of communication; they represent something, and then signal a capacity for a relationship with other polities, one that requires consistent negotiation.² These three characteristics are at the core of diplomacy’s purpose and its practice.³

The Olympic Games are universally seen as the pinnacle of sporting endeavour

for vast swaths of the global audiences, for sponsors, and, perhaps most importantly given the spectacle that results, for the athletes.⁴ The Olympics, perhaps more than any other sporting event, allow for what Naoko Shimazu considers “diplomacy as theatre”.⁵ Shimazu’s approach resonates neatly with sport where symbolic “performances” are undertaken upon particular “stages” set out for sport with perceivable levels of audience and athlete interaction. The sportsman or sportswomen as entertainer expressly allows for performances to surround the sporting endeavour; in tennis, one can think of the stark contrast in fiery John McEnroe and ice-cold Bjorn Borg’s “performance” alongside their sporting talents; in motor-racing, James Hunt and Nikki Lauder in the early 1970s or Ayrton Senna and Alain Prost in the 1980s were sporting rivalries where performance as much as skill were at stake. In such performances, elements of those key diplomatic purposes are evident.

Examples of the significance of sport to diplomatic practice are plentiful if routinely overlooked.⁶ They are overlooked in lieu of headline grabbing “sport and politics”; or the prospect of sport offering humanitarian solutions through the Sport, Development, Peace framework; or, and something that befalls both of these realms, because sport is seen as trivial or peripheral amid the crises that define global affairs. Of course, in many senses it is; as a general rule, contemporary sport does not result in life threatening hardship and death. However, there are numerous examples of sport resulting in the physical harm, discord and, occasionally, death for competitors and spectators.⁷ And to paraphrase the words of former Liverpool Football Club manager, Bill Shankly, “sport is not a matter of life and death; it is far more important than that.”⁸ In this light, it is imperative to balance the potential for good that sport can provide with the capacity it

possesses for abuse, foul-play, and conflict.⁹ George Orwell warned in 1945 against “blah-blahing about the clean, healthy rivalry of the football field and the great part played by the Olympic Games in bringing the nations together”; instead, he warned that sport brought out nationalism’s worst characteristics.¹⁰ Orwell saw nationalism as “the lunatic modern habit of identifying oneself with large power units and seeing everything in terms of competitive prestige.” To this he contended, “you do make things worse by sending forth a team of eleven men, labelled as national champions, to do battle against some rival team, and allowing it to be felt on all sides that whichever nation is defeated will ‘lose face’”. The importance for this discussion is that in diplomacy, the “losing” or “saving” of face – whilst employing the verbiage of sport – is critical in achieving one’s aims. Baroness Valerie Amos, a former UN under-secretary-general for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Co-ordinator, considers sport as “enabler”.¹¹ As such, sport does not just exist in the abstract but alongside other issues of international relations. In the past decade, for example, the UN has received regular reports on the role that sport plays in development and peace; a 2010 instance noted, sport “has been recognised as a powerful tool in contributing to the achievement” of the Millennium Development Goals.¹² It is therefore important to consider sport and diplomacy as having both positive and negative dimensions, often simultaneously. In other words, there is a balance in the scope of analysis that places sport into broad research methodologies and ethics of research.

The editors have deliberately brought together these articles, as they contribute to a burgeoning and ever more balanced literature on “Sport and Diplomacy” from a variety of different disciplinary backgrounds. The variety of perspectives and methodologies

reflects the capacity for a single object of study – sport – to provide the opportunity for sites of academic exchange.¹³ It is noteworthy because sport has received notably greater attention in fields other than that of diplomatic studies, such as sociology, history, physical education/kinesiology, development studies, and politics – a number of the contributors have heritages in one or more of these fields.

The contributions to this special issue address three key areas. The opening articles by Rofe, Pamment, and Branaghan and Grix address the place of sport and diplomacy as a field of study. They consider founding questions such as the parameters of sport and diplomacy – even if they are still to be established, the relationship with the topics “public diplomacy”, “soft power”, and participatory diplomacy models. The analyses they provide illustrate the scope for discourse here, and for the articles that follow. The subsequent two articles each address specific questions of practice in sport and diplomacy. Beacom and Brittan explore the role of Paralympic sport and its governing body, the International Paralympic Committee, as representing a particular group – disabled peoples – at national and international levels and in relation to national and international policies and attitudes. Grix and Posthlethwaite then address the framework in which the International Olympic Committee operates as a diplomatic actor eschewing a statist approach in favour of socio-legal theory. The final three articles address specific instances of sport and diplomacy in their appropriate contexts. Drawn from a range of historical epochs, they illustrate if nothing else that sport and diplomacy have never been absent in diplomatic practice in modern times. More significantly, Liston and Maguire, Dichter, and Brentin and Tregoures illustrate with aplomb sport’s abilities to contribute to broader historical reappraisal of three key moments of the twentieth

century the “interwar period”, the “post-war years”, and the “post-cold war era”. Each of these periods and their study illustrate aspects of transnational approaches that go beyond state-centred histories and consider transactions between peoples and organisations.

Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire, it has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope, where once there was only despair. It is more powerful than governments in breaking down racial barriers. It laughs in the face of all types of discrimination.¹⁴

These words of Nelson Mandela spoken in 2000 are *de rigueur* in offering up the explanatory powers of sport to a broader socio-political audience. This introduction has followed suit and, in doing so, makes three points illustrating the relationship between sport and diplomacy. First, Mandela, and with no lack of self-awareness, was speaking as president of South Africa and therefore as representative of a nation-state: the ultimate ambassador. Second, he was comfortable performing as a global statesman adopting a particularly diplomatic approach as *Madiba* – a respectful title from Mandela’s Xhosa clan – to the cause of sport as a tool for international development: not least in Africa. Finally, aware of the “theatre” of his own iconic image from the 1995 Rugby World Cup, he was campaigning and negotiating for an African World Cup that would eventually arrive in South Africa in 2010: he was well aware that his audience was global. Beyond the audience in the room including the Brazilian footballer, Pele, and the musician, Jon Bon Jovi, he surely recognised he was communicating to a global public that could help sway the actions of fellow leaders. In each of these capacities, Mandela’s words resonated then

and since. These articles contribute to understanding more fully the implications for diplomacy of Mandela's words.

Notes

¹ The author was fortunate in experiencing close hand the workings of LOCOG's "International Relations" department during the XXXth Olympiad, which ran from 25 July until the Paralympic Games closed on 9 September 2012.

² Diplomacy is rich in symbolism, often associated with pageantry, ceremony, and rituals that form diplomatic protocol. For further detail see Alisher Faizullaev, "Diplomacy and Symbolism", *Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 8/2(2013), 91-114.

³ Alison Holmes with J. Simon Rofe, *Global Diplomacy: Theories, Types and Models* (Boulder, CO, 2016).

⁴ Even modern professional sports such as basketball, tennis, and golf, which have their own highly coveted "prizes", have come to associate themselves with the Olympic Games from 2016 in ways that raise questions as to business and financial aspects of sport. Not the immediate concern of this anthology of articles on "Sport and Diplomacy", they form an important element to a number of the articles presented here.

⁵ Naoko Shimazu, "Diplomacy as Theatre: Staging the Bandung Conference of 1955", *Modern Asian Studies*, 48/1(2014), 225-52.

⁶ Geoff Berridge's seminal text has only one passing reference to "field sports" as a role for diplomats of yesteryear. See Geoff Berridge, *Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*, fifth edition (Basingstoke, 2015), 134. Scholars who are not alone in overlooking sport. In considering Britain's soft power influence in a House of Lords Select Committee report,

Persuasion and Power in the Modern World (London, 2014), the chapter entitled “The UK’s Soft Power Assets: Their Role and Function”, 123-26 considered sport last amongst British soft power assets. This discussion accounted for less than 10 of 203 paragraphs in this chapter. Cf. *Soft Power and the UK’s Influence Committee. Oral and Written Evidence*, 2 volumes (London, 2015): <http://www.parliament.uk/soft-power-and-uks-influence>.

⁷ The case of sportsmen and women’s death during competition is rare. Although not excluding other sports, boxers and drivers in motorsports provide some of the most high-profile victims. Simon Kuper, *Football Against the Enemy* (London, 1994), released as *Soccer against the Enemy* in the United States, illustrates the manner in which the global game can be the source of conflict. There is also the oft-referenced “football” or “soccer” “war” of 1969 between El Salvador and Honduras that arose during 1970 World Cup qualifying matches in the respective capitals during 1969. More recently, the *tifosi* of Egyptian football clubs have been directly involved in the violent turmoil associated with the Arab Spring. See James M. Dorsey’s blog, *The Turbulent World of Middle East Soccer*: <http://mideastsoccer.blogspot.ca/>.

⁸ Shankly allegedly said, “Some people believe football is a matter of life and death, I am very disappointed with that attitude. I can assure you it is much, much more important than that.” See “Bill Shankly in quotes” (3 December 2009): <http://liverpoolfc.com/news/latest-news/bill-shankly-in-quotes>.

⁹ Sport has a number of definitions that distinguish it from “play” and “games” resting on it being competitive, organised, and physical: cf. Orin Starn, *The Passion of Tiger Woods: An Anthropologist Reports on Golf, Race, and Celebrity Scandal* (Durham, NC,

2012). Yet the deeper truth of sport, as esteemed sports author Simon Barnes writes, “lies in the way that we remember the events, what they mean to us, how they affected us, how they changed us.” For Barnes, “Sport, as I have said more than once, is a living, unfolding mythology: vast collisions of archetypes in archetypal situations of conflict and camaraderie. This mythology is not found in the [outcome] but in the way we remember what happened, the way we talk about it, write about it, even sing about it.” Simon Barnes, “10 Years After”, *Cricket Monthly* (July 2015): <http://www.thecricketmonthly.com/story/885119/ten-years-after>. Barnes remarks are akin to the longstanding resilience of the “Great Sport Myth”, the intangible aspect of sport. See Jay Coakley, “Assessing the sociology of sport: On cultural sensibilities and the great sport myth”, *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 50/4-5(2015), 402-06.

¹⁰ George Orwell. “The Sporting Spirit”, *Tribune* (December 1945).

¹¹ Author Interview with Baroness Valerie Amos, London, 16 October 2015.

¹² Report by the Secretary-General to 65th Session of United Nations General Assembly, “Sport for Development and Peace: Strengthening the Partnerships” (9 August 2010) A/65/16: <http://research.un.org/en/docs/ga/quick/regular/65>.

¹³ Albert Camus famously stated “everything I know about morality and the obligations of men, I owe it to football”, indicates sports has at the very least an educational capacity.

¹⁴ “Speech by Nelson Mandela at the Inaugural Laureus Lifetime Achievement Award, Monaco 2000” (25 May 2000): <http://www.sweetspeeches.com/s/2474-nelson-mandela-speech-by-nelson-mandela-at-the-inaugural-laureus-lifetime-achievement-award-monaco-2000>.